

Students and Faculty: Knowing and Being Known



UI has a student:faculty ratio of 16:1, and 80% of classes have fewer than 30 students. However, with more than 21,000 undergraduates, and 5000+ classes offered during the academic year, it's not impossible to imagine that some students might feel like they could get lost in the crowd.

We analyzed student responses to the campus-wide SERU survey in order to learn more about student perceptions of whether their instructors know them individually. We also looked at the effects of these perceptions on other student experiences and outcomes captured by the survey. Our goal was to identify:

- To what extent do individual students feel they are known by their instructors at UI?
- In what ways do student perceptions of being known by their instructors affect other aspects of their university experience?
- What are implications of these findings for teaching, learning, and student success on our campus?

Findings from SERU

Overall, UI students report high levels of satisfaction with access to faculty, and the majority by far agree that faculty maintain open channels of communication with students, provide prompt and useful feedback, and treat students equitably and fairly.

Nearly 75% of students report that they have somewhat often, often, or very often taken classes in which the instructor knew or learned their name. Seniors report this perception at higher frequency levels than others, but rates are only slightly lower for other students.

By the time they enter the senior class, more than two-thirds of students report knowing two or more faculty members well enough to ask for a letter of recommendation; 90% report knowing at least one. Among students who have filed to graduate, that rate increases to 97%. As might be expected, frequency of taking classes in which the instructor knows your name is highly associated with the number of faculty you know well enough to ask for a recommendation.

Interestingly, the frequency of taking classes in which the instructor knows your name has a strong positive association with a number of other student perceptions of their undergraduate experience, including satisfaction with their academic experience, their social experience and sense of belonging at UI, their GPA, and the value of their education for the price they are paying.

Implications of Knowing and Being Known by Your Students

These observations suggest strategic steps for faculty who are interested in taking action to further support undergraduate engagement and success.

Student Experience in the Research University (SERU)

In 2013, UI joined a consortium of 16 research universities that administer the SERU Survey. SERU provides an extensive overview of student experience, overall satisfaction, academic and community engagement, evaluation of the major, and campus climate for diversity.

All undergraduates received email invitations to take the SERU survey online during spring semester. Students logged in with their student ID to take the survey, so responses could be linked to each student's academic and demographic characteristics. We received responses from a total of 29.8% of UI undergraduates during 2013, and 24.3% during 2014.

This *SERU Brief* presents a snapshot of SERU findings about the undergraduate experience at UI and suggests implications for faculty who work with these students.

For more information about SERU, see <http://www.uiowa.edu/assessment/seru>

Demonstrating That Each Student Matters

Most students report believing that faculty are available and provide helpful support when asked, but students vary widely in how much they report actually interacting with faculty during class, working with faculty outside of class, and seeking out faculty help when needed.

Since the realization that faculty know them as individuals appears to be positively associated in many ways with a student's broader undergraduate experience, it is well worth taking steps to engage students in the kinds of face-to-face interactions that will help them get to know and be known by their professors.

For faculty who know their students, it is important to demonstrate to students that they are known and their presence is recognized. For example,

- Use students' names when you know them, in and out of class.
- When you use small group discussion or problem-solving during class time, circulate to groups in all parts of the room to observe each group's progress and respond to student questions.
- Design class sessions with opportunities for active individual participation so that students can see you value individual student contributions to class discussions or group problem-solving.
- When you address questions that have come up outside of class, let students know you are responding to issues raised by one of them, demonstrating your responsiveness to concerns of individual students.

Knowing Your Students

For faculty who want to take additional steps to know and remember students individually,

- Learn and use student names. A variety of strategies are available, depending on class size, frequency of class meetings, etc. Contact the Center for Teaching for ideas that might be helpful in your classes: teaching@uiowa.edu
- Create assignments that bring students to review sessions or individual meetings during office hours. Direct interaction is the best way to get to know students individually, but many students are unlikely to initiate these interactions if they're not initially prompted by you to take part.
- In large classes, enlist the help of TAs and make sure they take time to know students in their sections by name and similarly recognize individual student contributions to class.
- You don't have to make it look easy. It may take a few class sessions to get to know students individually, and it's ok to let students see you are working on it.

Being Known by Your Students

In addition to letting students know they are not anonymous to you, you can also take steps to make sure that you are not anonymous to them.

- Use the minutes before and after class sessions to interact with students who are present.
- Talk about your work in the field, interests and experiences that drew you to the field when you were a student, or ways that course concepts are related to issues you address in your current work.
- Engage students outside of class through formal opportunities (such as involvement in research) or informal ones (such as events hosted by the department or the undergraduate student organization).
- Refer to your work with former students. For example, describe projects they did for your class, or let current students know about work others have done which helped you write them a strong letter of recommendation, connect them with a community service agency, or help them find an internship.

These suggestions are compatible with common practices for many faculty and likely to benefit all students. SERU responses suggest that they may be particularly important for students who are at risk of feeling lost in the crowd and uncertain about faculty interest in knowing or being known by them as individuals.